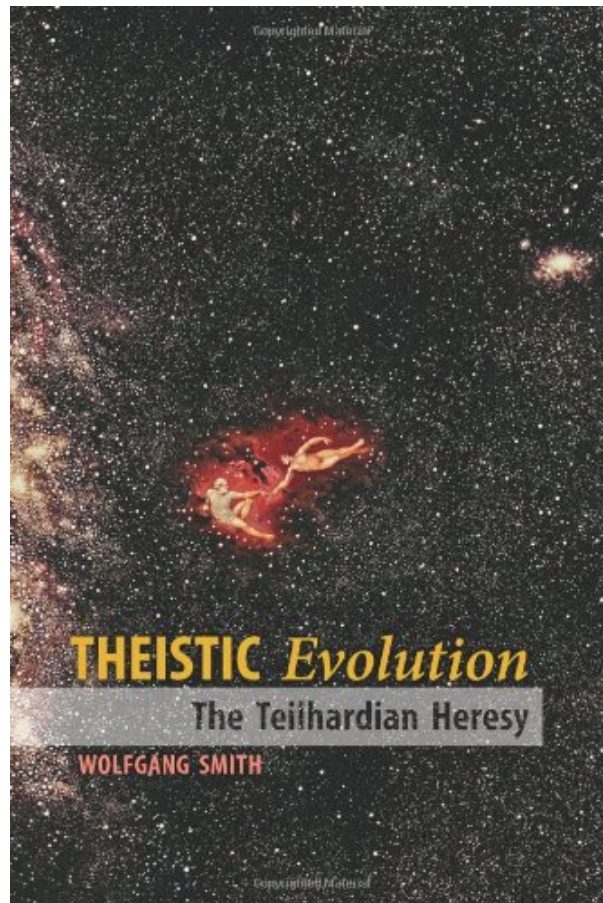
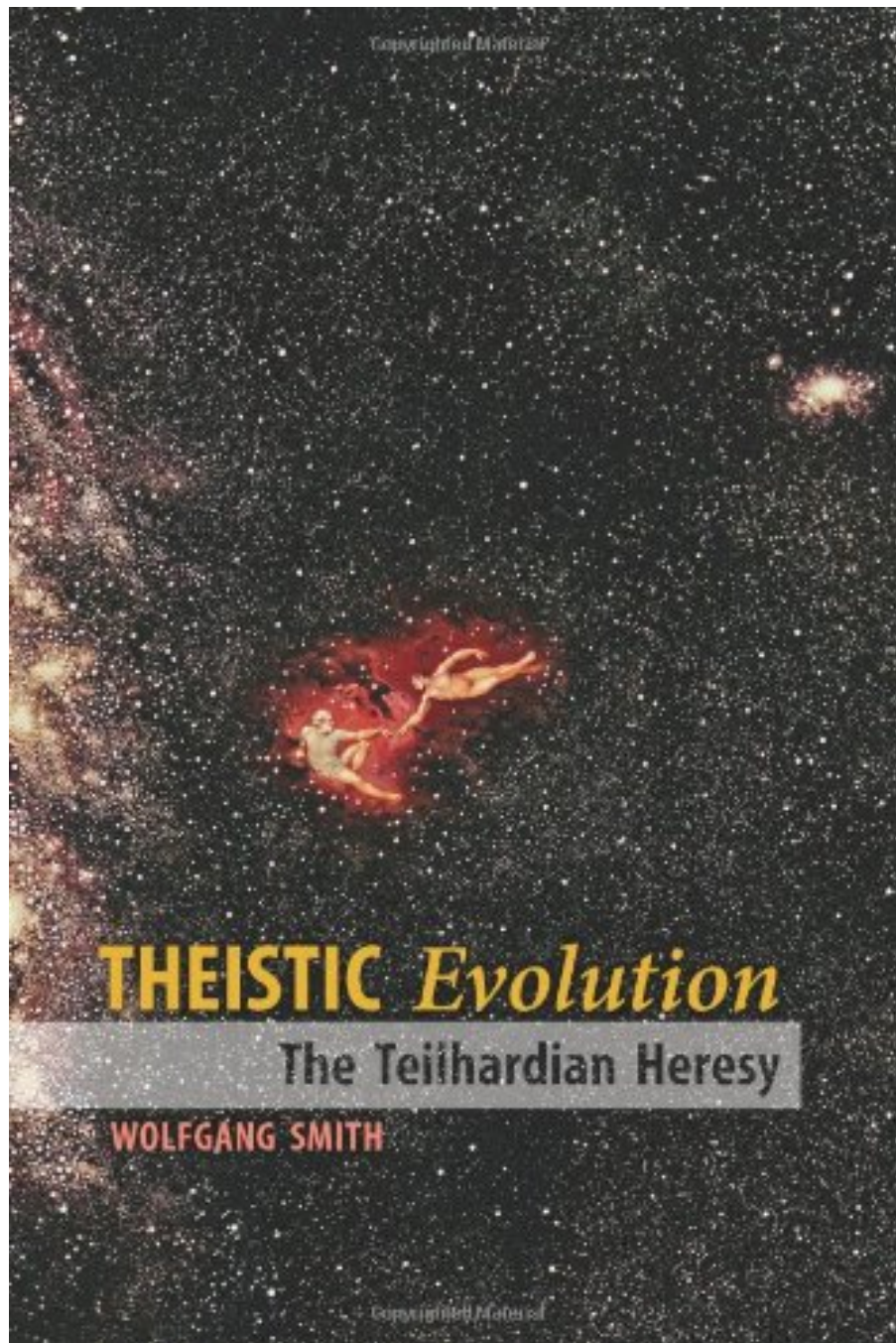


THEISTIC EVOLUTION: THE TEILHARDIAN HERESY BY WOLFGANG SMITH



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Review

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Darwin. Dawkins. Dennett. -- This voluble triumvirate has gained oracular status for many scientists and laypersons in the contemporary world. But though the edifice of thought they have erected over and against tradition and faith has gained currency in today's nihilistic mind, it is now rapidly eroding in the serious world of ideas.

But what of that heady amalgam of Science and Christianity first put together by Teilhard de Chardin, which struck the Catholic world like a whirlwind around the time of the Second Vatican Council and continues to the present day in the work of such Catholic evolutionists as John Haught and Kenneth R. Miller?

What as a rule has rendered Catholics vulnerable to Teilhardian tenets -- apart from the fact that these conform to the neo-humanist tendencies of our age -- is that the theory is clad in scientific garb: in the modern world, where Science speaks, it appears even angels will listen. In *Theistic Evolution*, Wolfgang Smith shows himself to be that rare person thoroughly grounded in both science and theology, and what he proves through detailed and rigorous argument is that Teilhard de Chardin has in fact sold us a veritable science-fiction theology.

This book, however, is much more than a masterful and indeed definitive refutation of theistic evolutionism: it is at the same time an incomparable introduction to long-forgotten metaphysical and theological truths. In language at once precise and lucid the author recalls teachings going back to the Greek and Latin Fathers, and explains their bearing on questions about the nature of God and man bungled at the hands of many contemporary scientists and theologians.

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Most helpful customer reviews

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Addresses root problems with theistic evolution that require a rewrite of basic Christian doctrines

By Cathy Duffy

Dr. Wolfgang Smith's educational and occupational background is in math and science, but for a number of years he has turned his attention to metaphysics, particularly examining and critiquing "scientism," defined by Wikipedia as "the view that empirical science constitutes the most authoritative worldview or most valuable part of human learning to the exclusion of other viewpoints." Smith's book, *Theistic Evolution: The Teilhardian Heresy* was first published in 1988 as *Teilhardism and the New Religion*. *Theistic Evolution*, published in 2012, has been updated and rearranged somewhat from the original book.

In the intervening 24 years, the influence of Teilhard de Chardin has become even clearer, especially among those holding theistic evolution views. Theological problems arising from theistic evolution seem to undermine belief in Adam and Eve's fall from grace, original sin, and other essential beliefs central to Christianity. While most theistic evolutionists try to reconcile these problems while remaining within the boundaries of historical Christianity, de Chardin seemed determined to reinvent Christianity to make it fit into a worldview based on evolution as the central idea. Smith writes:

For Teilhard de Chardin, evolution is not simply a scientific theory, but an established and henceforth irrefutable truth. It is in fact the rock upon which he would found his entire doctrine. "Is evolution a theory, a system or a hypothesis?" he writes. "It is much more: it is a general condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must bow and which they must satisfy henceforward if they are to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow." (p.25).

While most theistic evolutionists have at least some concern, if not a great deal of concern, for theological orthodoxy, many have been heavily influenced by de Chardin to the point that they adjust their theology to fit evolutionary assumptions rather than maintaining orthodox theology while exploring scientific questions for which proof remains elusive at best.

Smith draws heavily on de Chardin's written works with which he seems very familiar. He highlights de Chardin's key ideas such as the "Point Omega " (p. 94), "complexification" (p. 53), and personhood developed through a process of "aggregation" (p. 194), examining what de Chardin taught and then contrasting it with both scientific facts and Christian doctrine. This approach is very helpful since it is often difficult to read de Chardin and cut through the verbiage to what he is actually saying.

De Chardin, a French Jesuit priest, ran into serious conflicts with the Catholic Church over his ideas, but he was never excommunicated or formally declared a heretic. However, Smith clearly identifies de Chardin's teachings as heretical, providing the evidence in this book. For example, he quotes de Chardin's statement:

"As you already know, what dominates my interest and my preoccupation is the effort to establish in myself and to spread around a new religion (you may call it a better Christianity) in which the personal God ceases to be the great Neolithic proprietor of former times, in order to become the soul of the world; our religious and cultural stage calls for this." (p. 224).

De Chardin's new religion fits the definition of scientism, and he criticizes traditional Christianity for not being "scientific." Yet de Chardin's philosophy also includes improbable New Age spiritual notions alongside his supposedly scientific beliefs. While rejecting the resurrection, saints, and miracles, he proposes "cosmic convergence" and "Christic emergence" (p. 245) among other ideas. De Chardin presented some of these ideas in flowery prose that probably left many readers impressed with the high-minded sound of it yet short on theological understanding.

Theistic Evolution: The Teilhardian Heresy is not an easy read since it's not dealing with simple ideas. Yet, Smith does an excellent job of helping those unfamiliar with de Chardin understand some of his foundational ideas while simultaneously showing how faulty they are.

Because de Chardin has had such tremendous influence on Catholic thinking about the theory of evolution, I especially recommend this book to Catholics concerned about the Church's position on the topic.

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Beautiful Book about an Ugly Doctrine

By James Bell

This book brings all of the philosophical and scientific clarity that Wolfgang Smith has earned since the 1988 publication of *Teilhardism and the New Religion* to bear on the study. It is mostly the same work but with some additions here and there. It has one drawback compared to its earlier editions. Some of Smith's more obscure theological views relating to Meister Eckhart cause him to pull a few more punches towards the end of the book. However, the book is brilliant.

The influence of Teilhard de Chardin is extremely difficult to measure. But the Leadership Conference of Women Religious just had a "futurist" (a term that applies to Teilhard disciples) Barbara Marx Harbard talk to them about "conscious evolution" and the "noosphere." What is a "noosphere?" Where does Original Sin fit into Teilhard's theology? [Hint: it doesn't.]

Teilhard is a gifted communicator. But every trick he pulls is unmasked by Wolfgang Smith in this great book. Buy this book instead of the earlier TAN edition and read it immediately after completing *Cosmos and Transcendence*, Smith's first book.

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Dense but good

By Cornetto

Wolfgang Smith presents a convincing and critical review of the Teilhardian perspective. Briefly familiarizing oneself with some of Teilhard's thought would make this read even more fruitful in understanding a current of thought that bears a strong influence on today's faithful.

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